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ABSTRACT

A study compared surveys conducted in 2000 of the graduates of Australian TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and university bachelor programs and outlined some of the similarities and differences between the two sectors. Some of the key findings of the study are the following: (1) 89 percent of TAFE graduates were employed or in further study within 6 months of completing their course, and 92 percent of university graduates were employed or in further study within 4 months; (2) university graduates were much more likely to have undertaken their course on a full-time basis (75 percent) than TAFE graduates (37 percent); (3) TAFE graduates were on average older than university graduates, with the median age of responding graduates for TAFE being 27 years and for university, 23 years; (4) university graduates employed after their course were more likely to enter the full-time workforce for the first time (42 percent) than TAFE graduates (26 percent); and (5) a majority of graduates from both sectors expressed satisfaction with the overall quality of their course. (KC)

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NCVER

Statistics 2000

TAFE and university graduates

At a **Glance**

Some key findings:

- 76.0% of TAFE graduates were in employment within six months of completing their course while 66.9% of university graduates were employed within four months of completing their course.
- 89.2% of TAFE graduates were employed or in further study within six months of completing their course compared to 91.5% of university graduates (within four months).
- University graduates are much more likely to have undertaken their course with the intention of gaining employment (75.2% of university graduates compared to 37.2% of TAFE graduates).
- TAFE graduates were on average older than university graduates with the median age of responding graduates for TAFE being 27 years and for university 23 years.
- University graduates employed after their course were much more likely to enter the full-time workforce for the first time (41.9%) than TAFE graduates (24.0%).
- A majority of graduates from both sectors expressed satisfaction with the overall quality of their course.

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TAFE and university graduates 2000: At a Glance

This publication brings together some of the findings of the annual surveys of TAFE and university bachelor graduates (see notes on back page – About the surveys), and outlines some of the similarities and differences between the two sectors. The comparisons show that the sectors are very different, but complementary, meeting training needs and producing positive employment outcomes for a diverse range of clients.

Background

Size of the sectors

In terms of students, the vocational education and training (VET) sector, of which TAFE is a part, is more than twice the size of the Higher Education sector. However, in terms of full-time equivalent numbers, the VET sector, with its large number of part-time students, is smaller than the Higher Education sector.

Both sectors have experienced considerable growth over the past 10 years.

- The VET sector has grown by 77% between 1991 and 2000, to over 1.74 million students. Most of these, 1.32 million, were in vocational programs in TAFE institutions and other government providers in Australia in 2000. Just over 130,000 TAFE students completed a course in 1999 and were eligible for an AQF qualification.
- The Higher Education sector has grown by over 43% over the past 10 years to just over 695,000 students in 2000. Over 96,000 university students were eligible for an AQF qualification following completion of studies in 1999 for a bachelor degree (pass, graduate or honours) or a diploma.

Distribution of institutes and universities

- The TAFE system has 75 institutes with over 1,200 campuses in widely dispersed cities and towns throughout Australia, while the university system has a smaller network of just over 40 universities with about 100 campuses concentrated in the larger population centres.

Course particulars

- TAFE and university courses are quite different in entry requirements, duration, delivery method and qualification awarded.
- TAFE courses leading to a qualification vary widely in length of study, although more commonly they are relatively short in duration (the average is 10 months), with graduates able to complete a qualification within a year of full-time or part-time study. Traditional trade apprenticeships are longer, generally of three or four years' duration.
- TAFE courses can be delivered either at an institute or on a work site with a mixture of formal classes, on the job training and supervised work. Courses are designed for full or part-time attendance, generally do not prescribe a prior level of schooling and have an array of levels of qualifications that clients can choose at the start. Some students start TAFE courses while they are still at school, either as part of their school program or as an extra curricular activity.

- University offers a range of degrees and some diplomas, but most enrolments are in bachelor courses. These courses are designed for full or part-time attendance (with some exceptions such as medicine requiring full-time), are generally taken over three years of full-time study or longer part-time, and mostly require a higher school certificate with a prescribed score for entry purposes.

Students

The two sectors cater for different groups of students.

- University students are much younger than TAFE students. Almost two thirds of university graduates are in the 20 to 24 years age group after graduation while for TAFE this group comprised just over one quarter of the population of graduates. Very few university graduates are in the under 19 age group while TAFE has 15%. TAFE graduates' age profile tends to more closely reflect the community age profile.
- TAFE provides courses to meet a wide range of needs – entry level training, specific skills training for industry, upgrading of skills while in the workplace, change of career training, re-training for re-entry to the labour force and training while on the job (eg apprentices). TAFE students are far more likely to undertake their training as part-time study.
- University provides mainly bachelor courses for school leavers, particularly those students seeking to pursue careers in the professions and academic research, as well as those seeking a more extensive education experience. University students are twice as likely to undertake full-time study than TAFE students.

Qualifications

The range of qualifications and awards that TAFE and university offer is different but complementary; TAFE offers qualifications from AQF Certificate I up to AQF Advanced Diploma which can then lead into university degree awards. University, offering mainly degree awards, has qualifications ranging from AQF Diploma to Doctoral Degree.

- More than four in five university graduates received a pass bachelor degree (minimum of three years' full-time study). TAFE graduates, however, were more widely spread across the award range, with the greatest proportion, but just under one in three, qualifying for an AQF Certificate III or equivalent (trade certificate).

Employment

Overall employment outcomes for graduates from TAFE and university are very similar, with over two thirds of graduates employed soon after completing their course. However, TAFE and university cater to different occupation and industry sectors of the labour market.

- TAFE graduates are concentrated in the trades, clerical, sales and service occupations while university graduates are concentrated in the professional and management occupations.
- TAFE graduates are more likely to be employed across a wider range of industry groups, including Manufacturing, Construction, Health and community services, Wholesale and Retail trades and Finance & insurance/Property and business services.

Profile of graduates

TAFE graduates are a more diverse group than university graduates across a range of characteristics, including gender balance, age distribution, indigenous status and non-English speaking background (Table 1).

The major areas of divergence are:

- Higher proportions of graduates in university are female (61.5%) compared with TAFE (53.1%).
- TAFE graduates are older (median age 27 years) than university graduates (23 years).
- Very few university graduates are aged under 19 (1%), while about 15% of TAFE graduates fall into this group.
- The majority of university bachelor degree graduates attended university on a full-time basis (75.2%) while for TAFE only 37.2% of graduates attended full-time.
- TAFE graduates are more likely to have a Non-English speaking (31.3%) or indigenous (2.0%) background than university graduates (16.7% and 0.7% respectively).
- University graduates are far more likely to move to undertake their study (22.6%) compared to TAFE graduates (7.5%).
- More university graduates (69.7%) have completed high school compared to TAFE graduates (52.5%)

Table 1: Graduates' demographic profile, TAFE and University, Australia 2000

	TAFE graduates %	University graduates %
Males	46.9	38.4
Females	53.1	61.5
Age at survey date:		
15-19 years	14.9	1.0
20-24 years	27.5	61.3
25-29 years	12.1	14.5
30-34 years	9.3	6.8
35-39 years	11.0	5.7
40 years and over	25.1	10.0
Median age of graduates	27 years	23 years
Undertook study on a full-time basis#	37.2	75.2
Indigenous Australians	2.0	0.7
Non-English speaking background*	31.3	16.7
Relocate to do course	7.5	22.6
Pre course schooling – Completed high school	52.5	69.7

TAFE and university figures may not be directly comparable. TAFE calculation of full-time study (for the purposes of this publication) is nominally 16 hours or more per week. University definition of full-time study is not specific. Graduates report further study in a question which nominates full time or part time study categories but does not define the hours.

* Some difference in collecting this data item may result in small reporting differences. TAFE is based on language spoken at home by graduate or language of parents. University is based on self identification as having a 'non-English speaking background'.

Qualifications

When comparing the qualifications awarded to TAFE graduates and university graduates (Table 2), it becomes apparent that there is virtually no overlap between the sectors. The six AQF levels - AQF Certificate I to AQF Advanced Diploma are of direct relevance to TAFE training, and the AQF Bachelor's Degree classification level is related mostly to university training.

The differences in qualifications awarded are:

- Most university graduates (84.4%) have undertaken courses leading to a Pass Bachelor Degree. Courses taken by TAFE graduates lead to a wider range of AQF qualifications from AQF Certificate I to AQF Advanced Diploma. AQF Certificates I to III (and equivalent) together comprise 61.6% of TAFE qualifications awarded.
- The proportion of TAFE graduates whose prior qualification was a bachelor degree, while relatively small (8.8% in 2000), has increased since 1997 (7.2%).

Table 2: Qualifications awarded to TAFE and university graduates, Australia 2000

	TAFE graduates %	University graduates %
Pass bachelor degree	–	84.4
Honours bachelor degree	–	14.4
AQF Diploma, associate & advanced diploma	16.6	1.3
AQF Certificate IV & equivalent	15.5	–
AQF Certificate III & equivalent	32.0	–
AQF Certificate II & I	29.6	–
Other Certificates	6.2	–
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Employment outcomes - Labour force status after course

Since university and TAFE graduates have different backgrounds and experiences, it is reasonable to expect that the employment outcomes and further studies undertaken will vary.

Table 3 indicates the labour force status for TAFE and university graduates soon after graduation, and for the Australian population aged 15 and over as at May 2000. The table shows that the labour force outcomes for TAFE and university differ in some respects, and also vary from the Australian average, as follows:

- The proportion of TAFE graduates employed after completing their course (76.0%) was higher than for university (66.9%), the majority in full-time employment. Both sectors had higher employment rates than the Australian population.
- The proportion of TAFE graduates unemployed and looking for full-time or part-time work (11.2%) was higher than for university graduates (5.0%). TAFE is considerably higher than the Australian average of 4.2%, whereas university is much closer.
- The proportion of TAFE graduates not in the labour force (ie not looking for work) (12.1%) was half that for university (28.1%). Of these university graduates, most (85.9%) were in full-time study while for TAFE it was just under two thirds (62.5%).

Table 3: Labour force status, TAFE and University graduates and Australian population, Australia 2000			
	TAFE graduates	University graduates	Australian population**
	%	%	%
Employed*:	76.0	66.9	59.4
Full-time	50.4	54.7	43.5
Part-time	23.3	12.2	15.9
Unemployed:	11.2	5.0	4.2
Seeking full-time work	6.4	4.4	3.2
Seeking part-time work	4.7	0.6	1.0
Not in labour force	12.1	28.1	36.4
Total	**(a)100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

* TAFE employed includes 'not stated hours' for full-time and part-time.

**ABS Labour Force Australia, May 2000. Labour force status of civilian population aged 15 and over, Australia, May 2000.

(a) Excludes TAFE graduates not employed but not further indicated.

If employed graduates are further divided into those in their first full-time job, the numbers differ considerably between TAFE and university, reflecting the fact that unlike university graduates, many TAFE graduates have already been in the workforce. In 2000 just over one quarter of employed TAFE graduates (26.0%) were in their first full-time job, while this figure was higher (41.9%) for employed university graduates.

Further study outcomes

After graduation many TAFE and university graduates undertake further study to obtain further or higher qualifications. More TAFE graduates than university graduates are undertaking either full-time or part-time further study. Table 4 shows the percentage of graduates undertaking further study as well as the combined percentage in work or further study.

- Undertaking either full-time or part-time further study are 38.4% of TAFE graduates and 34.1% of university graduates.
- Of the university graduates going on to further study, the majority go to university (81.1%) while for TAFE graduates, 21.7% go to university and the majority mostly to TAFE.
- After completing their respective courses the overwhelming majority of TAFE (89.2%) and university (91.5%) graduates are in work or study of some kind, with most graduates in either full-time work or full-time further study.
- More TAFE graduates are working and undertaking further study (25.2%) than university graduates (11.9%)

Table 4: Employment and further study, TAFE and University graduates, Australia 2000		
	TAFE graduates	University graduates
	%	%
Undertaking further study	38.4	34.1
Working or in further study	89.2	91.5
Working and in further study	25.2	11.9

Occupational outcomes

There are major differences between the occupation outcomes in the two sectors, suggesting that TAFE and university prepare graduates for different occupational segments of the labour market. University graduates are concentrated in only a few occupations, particularly the higher skilled occupations such as professionals and associate professionals. TAFE graduates, however, are working in a broader range of occupations, with some concentration in the technical occupations such as tradespersons, and in the lower skilled occupations of Intermediate and Elementary clerical, sales and service workers. Table 5 below highlights these differences.

- The majority of university graduates are employed in one occupation - the Professionals category (59.8%). This is almost five times greater than the proportion of TAFE graduates (12.8%) employed in this category, and more than three times the proportion for the entire Australian workforce (18.2%).
- Over 75% of university graduates are in the three occupations with the highest skill levels, Managers and administrators, Professionals, and Associate professionals, almost three times that of TAFE graduates (26.8%). Very few university graduates are employed in lower skilled occupations.
- TAFE graduates, while spread across a wider range of occupations than university graduates, are most concentrated in the Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers (24.2%) and the Tradespersons and related workers occupations (22.3%).
- Compared to total employment in Australia, TAFE graduates are under-represented in the Managers and administrators, Professionals and Intermediate production and transport workers occupations. University graduates are under-represented in all but three occupations, Professionals, Associate professionals and Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers.

Table 5: Occupation of employed TAFE and University graduates, and employed persons, Australia 2000

Occupation category	TAFE graduates	University graduates	Employed persons, Australia May 2000*
	%	%	%
Managers and administrators	4.5	4.9	7.0
Professionals	12.8	59.8	18.2
Associate professionals	9.5	11.8	11.2
Tradespersons and related workers	22.3	0.3	13.3
Advanced clerical and service workers	4.5	3.3	4.3
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers**	24.2	18.5	17.5
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	10.5	–	9.7
Intermediate production and transport workers***	4.5	1.4	8.9
Labourers and related workers	7.3	–	9.7
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

* ABS Labour Force Australia, May, 2000 – total includes 'not stated'

** Occupation categories for university combined - Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers combined with Elementary clerical, sales and service workers. Therefore the figures for the two sectors are not comparable.

*** Occupation categories for university combined – Intermediate production and transport workers combined with Labourers and related workers. Therefore the figures for the two sectors are not comparable.

Industry of employment

Similar to the occupational segmentation found in the two sectors, TAFE and university supply skilled labour to different industries. University graduates are clustered in only a few industries, whereas TAFE graduates are distributed somewhat more evenly across the range of industries. Table 6 shows the industry of employment for TAFE and university graduates and the clustering referred to above.

- Over 60% of university graduates were employed in just four industries, Finance and insurance and Property and business services (combined 23.8%), Health and community services (18.2%) and Education (19.6%).
- TAFE graduates, although more widely spread across the industries than university graduates, are most likely to work in Health and community services (16.0%), Retail trade (15.1%) and Manufacturing (11.7%) industries.
- Compared to total Australian workforce employment patterns, TAFE graduates are over-represented in two industries, Accommodation, cafes and restaurants and Health and community services, and are under-represented in four industries, Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Wholesale and Retail trade and Finance and insurance/Property and business services.
- University graduates, when compared to total Australian workforce employment patterns, are over-represented in the service-based industries of Finance and insurance/Property and business services, Government administration and defence, Education and Health and community services. They are under-represented in Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Manufacturing, Construction, Wholesale and Retail trade, Transport and storage.

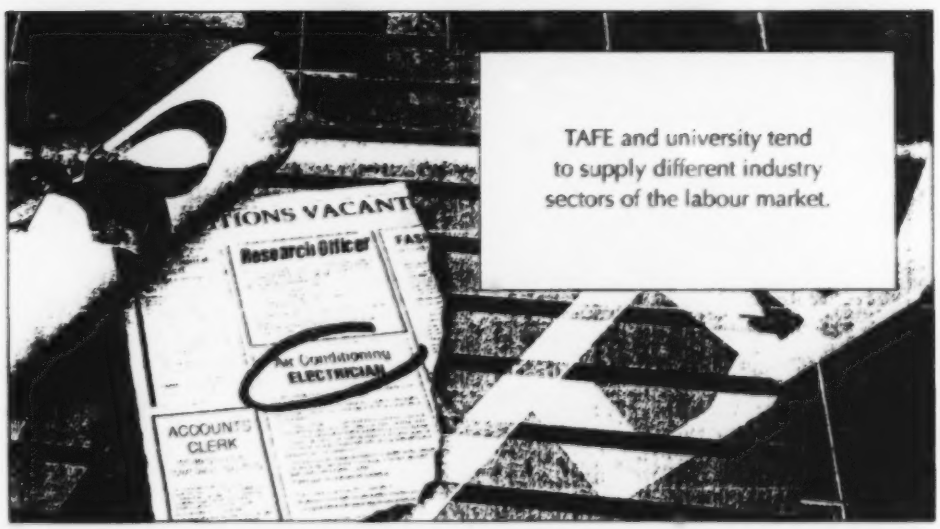
TAFE and university tend to supply different industry sectors of the labour market.
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Table 6 Industry of employment for TAFE and University graduates, and employed persons, Australia 2000

Industry category *	TAFE graduates	University graduates	Employed persons Australia, May 2000**
	%	%	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	3.0	1.4	4.9
Mining	1.5	0.8	0.8
Manufacturing	11.7	4.8	13.0
Electricity, gas & water supply	0.8	0.6	0.7
Construction	8.6	1.4	7.8
Wholesale and Retail trade#	16.7	7.8	19.5
Accommodation, cafes & restaurants	7.1	3.5	5.0
Transport & storage	3.4	1.3	4.6
Communications	1.3	1.6	2.0
Finance & insurance and Property & business services#	12.2	23.8	15.1
Government administration & defence	3.5	8.6	3.8
Education	6.7	19.6	6.8
Health & community services	16.0	18.2	9.5
Cultural & recreational services	2.8	3.4	2.4
Personal & other services	4.7	3.2	3.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

* Classified on the basis of the business or service carried out by the graduate's employer according to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classifications (ANZSIC).

** ABS, Labour Force Australia, May 2000 – total includes 'not stated'

Two industries combined to enable comparisons between the TAFE and university sectors

Graduate earnings

Generally, longer education and training leads to higher earnings, and occupations with higher level skills pay more than those with lower level skills. The concentration of university graduates in the higher skilled occupations has an impact on the comparison of earnings of graduates from the two sectors. This is reflected in Table 7 below, which shows average weekly earnings of TAFE and university graduates in their first full-time job by sex and occupation. (Some occupational groups' earnings are combined to enable comparisons between the two sectors, reporting for which varies because of survey coding practices.)

Table 7 shows that TAFE graduate earnings vary considerably more and are lower than for university graduates. In 2000, TAFE graduates in their first full-time job earned $494 on average per week, while university graduates earned $659 on average per week.

Table 7: Average weekly earnings of first full-time job holders, TAFE and University graduates, Australia 2000

Category – male/female, occupation	TAFE graduates*	University graduates **
	$	$
Males	520	704
Females	451	632
Persons	494	659
Occupation:		
Managers and administrators, and professionals #	631	684
Associate professionals	591	656
Tradespersons and related workers	491	–
Advanced clerical and service workers	475	601
Intermediate and elementary clerical, sales and service workers #	439	550
Intermediate production and transport workers and labourers and related workers #	468	544

* For TAFE graduates, average weekly earnings have been derived from mid points within specified salary ranges

** For university graduates, average weekly earnings have been derived from annual salary data

Two occupations are combined to enable comparisons between the TAFE and university sectors

From Table 7 it can be seen that, for first full-time job holders:

- The combined categories of Managers and administrators and Professionals are the highest paid for university graduates in their first full-time job ($684 per week) and for TAFE graduates in their first full-time job ($631 per week).
- Of the three highest paid occupations, Managers and administrators, Professionals, and Associate professionals, over 80% of university graduates in their first full-time job are in these three occupations, compared with only 18% of TAFE graduates.
- The lowest paid occupation category for university graduates in their first full-time job is the combined Intermediate production and transport, and Labourers and related workers ($544 per week). For TAFE graduates the lowest paid occupation category is the combined Intermediate and Elementary clerical, sales and service workers ($439 per week).

Overall satisfaction with course

Overall satisfaction with the quality of the course was similar for both university and TAFE graduates, but because different rating scales were used in the two questionnaires, direct comparisons should be treated with caution.

TAFE graduates rated the overall quality of their course as 'above average' or 'excellent' (a score of 7 or above on a 10 point scale) in 80.1% of cases, while 66.9% of university graduates agreed or strongly agreed (on a five point scale) that overall, they were satisfied with the quality of their course.

Conclusion

The data show that the two sectors are very different in a range of characteristics, and in employment and further study outcomes. Clearly, for the most part, the two sectors service very different industry sectors and provide employment within different occupations. TAFE has slightly higher employment outcomes than university, and its graduates are employed in a much broader range of occupations and industries.

In terms of further study, university graduates are more likely to go on to full-time study. They are also more likely to undertake full-time study at a university, whereas TAFE graduates are more likely to continue in part-time study at a university or a TAFE institute. Increasingly however, university graduates are undertaking further study at TAFE.

In terms of overall satisfaction, graduates of both sectors report satisfaction with their courses, which would seem to suggest that the sectors are providing complementary education, training and employment outcomes to match community and economic needs.

About the surveys

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA) conduct annual surveys of new graduates of TAFE and university respectively. These surveys measure a range of characteristics, including employment and further study outcomes, soon after graduates' completion of their course.

In 2000 NCVER conducted a sample survey of 41,660 new TAFE graduates in Australia who successfully completed their course during 1999 and graduated with a qualification. The TAFE survey collected information at the end of May 2000. All TAFE figures listed in the publication relate to this group of TAFE students unless otherwise specified.

The GCCA surveyed almost 57,000 new university bachelor graduates who qualified in 1999 from all Australian universities (within a wider survey covering graduates at all levels who qualified for the award of a degree or diploma in 1999). The university survey collected information at the end of October 1999 for graduates completing their courses in the first half of 1999, and at the end of April 2000 for graduates completing their course in the second half of 1999. For the purposes of this comparative study, only university bachelor graduates, and not the entire graduate population, are included in the analysis. This group comprises those who qualified for Pass, Graduate or Honours bachelor degrees or an undergraduate diploma.

The surveys provide estimates of the results that would be found if all graduates in Australia had been surveyed. The university survey was a census of graduates, and the TAFE survey was a sample survey, the responses of which are weighted to population benchmarks. As the survey estimates are based on information obtained from only a sample of graduates in both sectors, an allowance for sampling variability should be made when using the results.

One measure of sampling variability is the relative standard error, which is obtained by expressing the standard error as a percentage of the estimate to which it refers. The relative standard error is a useful measure, in that it provides an immediate indication of the percentage errors likely to have occurred due to sampling, and avoids the need to refer also to the size of the estimate. Unless marked with a ^ the TAFE estimates in this publication have a relative standard error of less than 25%.

This publication has been produced with the co-operation of the Graduate Careers Council of Australia, which has provided the university graduate data on which the tables have been based.

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Comments and suggestions regarding this publication are welcomed. They should be forwarded to the address below.

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